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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2922  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2572  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7425  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6556  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1763  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0754  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001208

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/12/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS APPROVED WITHOUT DEBATE

REF: A. ALGIERS 1194

[1](#)B. 07 ALGIERS 1749

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) Algeria's new constitution was ratified in a special November 12 joint session of the Algerian parliament, during which senators and MPs voted overwhelmingly to approve the constitutional amendments proposed by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (ref A). After an introduction by Senate President Abdelkader Bensalah, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia outlined each of the amendments for the assembled MPs. Following a 40-minute break, the MPs regrouped and approved the amendments by a show of hands. After brief closing remarks by Bensalah, the constitutional revision session was officially concluded in time for lunch. Parliamentarians from both the ruling coalition and opposition confirm that at no time during the process -- which began a day earlier with a special meeting of the joint judicial committees of both houses -- was the floor opened up for debate on the content of the amendments. The November 12 proceedings were broadcast live on Algerian state television.

A LEGISLATIVE BLITZKRIEG  
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[1](#)2. (C) As reported ref A, the official process began with the November 3 meeting of the Council of Ministers, convened by Bouteflika. The Ministers approved the amendments that same day and by close of business had passed them to the Constitutional Council for its required review. The Council announced its support over the weekend; the amendments were presented to both houses of parliament the next morning. In advance of the November 12 special session to ratify the amendments, a joint session of the judicial committees of both houses met and gave its approval, a required legal step for presentation of the legislation to the November 12 full session. The senators and MPs approved the amendments by a show of hands, with 500 attendees voting yes, 21 voting no, and 8 abstentions. All told, the process of revising the constitution took nine days, during which it passed through and received the blessing of all of the major institutions within the three branches of government -- the cabinet, the judiciary, and parliament.

"WE DON'T NEED DEBATE"  
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[1](#)3. (C) Miloud Chorfi, spokesperson of PM Ouyahia's National Democratic Rally (RND), told us following the ratification that the revision was "a very positive step for Algeria." He said Algeria would now have "a strong presidential regime,

and one efficient legislative program," the implementation of which would be the mandate of the prime minister. Chorfi conceded that there had been no debate or discussion at any point during the amendment process, but said "we don't need debate," as the revisions were clear and well-prepared. Unsurprisingly, opposition MP Tarek Mira of the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) blasted the entire process in a conversation with us after the vote. The process, Mira said, "was a total masquerade," and was merely designed to approve the amendments. At no time, Mira said, were MPs given an opportunity to raise objections, ask questions or make statements. The RCD's 19 members in the lower house of parliament were the bulk of those who voted against the amendments.

COMMENT: WHAT COMES NEXT

14. (C) As parliamentarians have confirmed, the constitutional revision process was devoid of any debate in any of the branches of government. Under the new constitution, PM Ouyahia must now technically resign and be reappointed by Bouteflika. Bouteflika may now also appoint vice-prime ministers. Conventional wisdom, echoed this week in an editorial in the French-language daily El Watan, is that Bouteflika will now use that authority to appease Islamists and members of the ruling coalition alike by appointing Ministers of State Abdelaziz Belkhadem and Bouguerra Soltani as vice-prime ministers. Belkhadem is the head of the National Liberation Front, the largest party in the ruling coalition, while Soltani is the head of the Movement for a

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Society of Peace, the coalition's Muslim Brotherhood party. With Ouyahia as president of the RND, all three coalition parties would then be accounted for. The next step towards the April 2009 presidential elections will be the expected formal announcement by Bouteflika of his candidacy for reelection. The smooth bending of Algeria's political institutions to Bouteflika's will on the constitution, coupled with the irregularities of the most recent elections last November (ref B), leaves little reason to believe that a Bouteflika candidacy will augur competitive and transparent elections.

PEARCE